

# Gender Differences Based on Environmental Factors of Drug Abuse among Adolescents in Melaka

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**To Link this Article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i2/25708> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i2/25708

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**Published Online:** 19 June 2025

## Abstract

Drug abuse is a deviant behavior that negatively affects individuals, families, and society. From an Islamic perspective, such acts are strictly prohibited as they harm both the mind and body and divert individuals from their responsibilities as servants of Allah. Adolescents, being in a transitional phase, are particularly vulnerable to environmental influences that may lead to drug abuse. This study aims to identify gender-based differences in environmental factors contributing to drug abuse among adolescents in the state of Melaka. A quantitative research design using descriptive survey methods was employed, involving 687 students from three

districts: Alor Gajah, Melaka Tengah, and Jasin. The findings revealed significant differences in environmental factors influencing drug abuse based on gender. The study recommends the implementation of comprehensive and effective prevention programs through collaboration between schools, families, and the community. These efforts should be reinforced by Islamic values such as *amar makruf nahi mungkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), spiritual education, and the strengthening of religious faith to develop resilient adolescents capable of resisting negative influences. This integrated approach is essential for nurturing a healthy, balanced, and responsible young generation.

**Keywords:** Drug Abuse, Teenagers, Environmental Factors, Gender Differences, Prevention

### Introduction

Drug abuse is a serious social issue among adolescents, bringing harmful effects to individuals, families, and society. In Islam, the use of substances that impair the mind and body is prohibited, as stated by Allah SWT in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 195: "And do not throw yourselves into destruction" Drug abuse disrupts an individual's physical, mental, and spiritual balance, and distances a person from fulfilling their responsibilities as a *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth.

Adolescents are in a life stage filled with challenges and identity exploration. This transitional period makes them more vulnerable to risks, including drug abuse. Social environmental factors such as peer influence and local culture play a significant role in triggering interest in drugs. Academic pressure, curiosity, and emotional struggles often drive negative behaviors. A study by Pedersen et al. (2016) found that peer influence and the desire to experiment are among the main predictors of early drug involvement among adolescents. In the context of Islam, choosing good companions is a fundamental principle, as emphasized in the saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "A person is upon the religion of his friend, so let one of you look at whom he befriends." (Riwayat Abu Daud)

Gender differences also play a role in the tendency toward drug abuse. According to data from the National Anti-Drugs Agency (2023), among Malay adolescents, 81.4% of drug users are male, while 18.6% are female. This indicates a higher tendency among males, possibly due to social and cultural factors that negatively encourage boldness or a desire to be accepted by peers. In some cases, male adolescents face pressure to prove their masculinity through risky behaviors such as drug use (Miziker-Gonet, 2010). In Islam, men are entrusted with the role of leaders and protectors, and thus should be empowered with strong spiritual and moral education.

Socioeconomic factors also have a significant impact. Adolescents from low-income families are at higher risk of becoming involved in drug abuse compared to those from more economically stable backgrounds. Financial stress, limited access to education, and a lack of healthy activities contribute to this tendency (Spooner & Hetherington, 2004). Islam calls for social justice and care for marginalized groups through institutions such as *zakat* (almsgiving), *waqf* (endowment), and community welfare.

Therefore, addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach grounded in Islamic values, involving collaboration among families, educational institutions, authorities, and the broader community. Early drug prevention education, strengthening the family institution as

a moral safeguard, and providing an environment that supports the spiritual and social well-being of adolescents are key strategies in curbing this problem. This integrated effort aligns with Islam's goal of nurturing a healthy, morally upright, and responsible young generation.

### Research Objectives

In general, this study is conducted with the aim of examining the differences between genders based on the environmental factors of drug abuse among adolescents in the state of Melaka. To achieve the objectives of this study, the research question also needs to be answered, which is whether there are differences between genders based on the environmental factors of drug abuse among adolescents in the state of Melaka.

### Research Method

#### *Research Design*

A quantitative approach using a descriptive survey was employed in this study. The survey method was chosen because it is a technique that can measure attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of the study participants through the distribution of research instruments (Mohd Sajari et al., 2023). A set of questionnaires was distributed to the respondents to identify differences in environmental factors influencing the tendency of drug abuse based on gender among students in selected schools in the state of Melaka.

#### *Research Sample*

This study was conducted across the state of Melaka, involving three districts: Alor Gajah, Melaka Tengah, and Jasin. The schools were selected through simple random sampling, with each school representing one district in Melaka. The researcher then ensured the total population of the study through interviews with teachers at the participating schools. Afterward, the sample size was determined, which amounted to 687 students from schools in Melaka. Below is the population of schools involved and the sample calculation for the study:

Table 1

*Sample Calculation Table (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970)*

| Names of School | Population | Sample     |
|-----------------|------------|------------|
| SMKR            | 600        | 239        |
| SMKS            | 485        | 216        |
| SMKKB           | 550        | 232        |
| <b>Total</b>    |            | <b>687</b> |

#### *Research Instrument*

This study used two sets of questionnaires. The first set is the Demographic Profile Questionnaire, which includes information on gender, school district, age, ethnicity, living arrangements, parents' occupation, parents' income, and knowledge about drugs. The second questionnaire is the Environmental Factors in Drug Abuse Tendency Instrument, which was developed by the researcher. Before the actual study was conducted, the researcher developed a questionnaire that was aligned with the study's framework based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. This questionnaire underwent expert evaluation and statistical analysis, including Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), containing 10 items. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale from 1 to 5: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 =

Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The results from a pilot study showed that the questionnaire had a good reliability value of 0.793 for all items. According to Habsah et al. (2018), a Cronbach's Alpha value exceeding 0.70 is considered good. The items for the Environmental Factors in Drug Abuse Tendency Instrument are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Items of the Questionnaire for the Environmental Factors in Drug Abuse Tendency Instrument*

| Item | Statement   |
|------|---|
| 1    | Advertisements on social media made me aware of the dangers of drug abuse.  |
| 2    | Parents/guardians inquire about my activities at school through the teachers.   |
| 3    | Parents/guardians who understand their children's behaviour can prevent involvement in drug abuse.  |
| 4    | I realize that the government has provided billboards about drug abuse around me (such as in residential areas, schools, on the roads, and in food premises). |
| 5    | Religious activities in my area can keep me away from drug abuse.   |
| 6    | Parents/guardians do not bring workplace problems home.   |
| 7    | Neighbors around me often reprimand inappropriate behaviour.  |
| 8    | The teachers and I have a good relationship at school.  |
| 9    | Drug abuse prevention activities are important in my residential area.  |
| 10   | I do not misuse the money given to me by my parents/guardians by buying drugs.  |

## Result

*Descriptive Findings*

Table 3

*Number of Respondents Based on Gender*

| Gender | Respondents | Percent (%) |
|--------|-------------|-------------|
| Male   | 339         | 49.3        |
| Female | 348         | 50.7        |
| Total  | 687         | 100         |

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents based on gender. This study involved a total of 339 male respondents, representing 49.3%, while the number of female respondents was 348, representing 50.7%.

Table 4

*Number of Respondents Based on Age*

| Age      | Respondents | Percent (%) |
|----------|-------------|-------------|
| 13 years | 238         | 34.6        |
| 14 years | 191         | 27.8        |
| 15 years | 165         | 24.0        |
| 16 years | 93          | 13.5        |
| Total    | 687         | 100         |

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents by age. This study involved a total of 238 respondents, with 34.6% aged 13 years, followed by 191 respondents aged 14 years (27.8%), 165 respondents aged 15 years (24%), and 93 respondents aged 16 years (13.5%).

### *Inferences Findings*

Table 5

*Results of T-Test for Environmental Factors of Drug Abuse among students in Melaka Schools based on Gender*

| Gender | N   | Min   | Standard Deviation | t     | dk  | k     |
|--------|-----|-------|--------------------|-------|-----|-------|
| Male   | 339 | 38.94 | 6.42               | 2.246 | 652 | 0.025 |
| Female | 348 | 39.95 | 5.25               |       |     |       |

Table 5 shows that the mean score for male respondents was 38.94, while the mean score for female respondents was 39.95. This indicates a notable difference in the mean scores between males and females. The t-value was 2.246 with a p-value of 0.025. Since the p-value is smaller than the significance level of 0.05, the findings indicate a statistically significant difference in the environmental factors of drug abuse based on gender, [t (652) = 2.246, p < 0.05].

### **Discussion**

Drug abuse can lead to self-destruction, loss of self-control, personal neglect, the breakdown of family institutions, criminal activities, and unpleasant physical conditions (Mohd Norarshad et al., 2021). Individuals often fall into negative behaviours due to a lack of self-awareness. Overall, the findings indicate a significant difference in environmental factors of drug abuse based on gender. This is evident from the mean score for male respondents (M = 38.94) and female respondents (M = 39.95), reflecting a notable difference. The study suggests that women are more at risk of engaging in drug abuse compared to men.

According to Abdul Latip et al. (2022), female involvement in drug use negatively impacts the achievement of a harmonious family structure. Changes in women's roles identity, responsibilities and careers have led to increased stress, contributing to social issues such as drug abuse. Mahmood et al. (2005) noted that women misuse drugs not only for pleasure but also due to lifestyle reasons such as maintaining beauty and body weight. This aligns with Abdul Latip et al. (2022), who also found that some women use drugs for appearance-related purposes.

Brady, Back, and Greenfield (2017) emphasized that lifestyle factors contribute significantly to women's drug abuse. Women with family members involved in drug abuse are at a higher risk due to constant exposure to dysfunctional family environments, either through coercion or voluntary influence. Ibrahim et al. (2014) found that some women are influenced by their drug-using husbands. Family dysfunction such as divorce, polygamy, and abuse can lead to emotional distress and make women more vulnerable to drug abuse as a coping mechanism (Hussain & Mustafa, 2017). Mohamed & Marican (2012) noted that heroin use provided temporary relief from life's hardships.

Brady et al. (2017) also reported that women who experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, including prostitution and neglect, struggle with functioning in healthy adult lives and are more susceptible to drug abuse. Mahmood (2005) further supported this by stating that many female drug users had histories of severe abuse. International research confirms that female addicts often suffer from traumatic life experiences, dysfunctional families, and childhood abuse (Hien, Cohen, & Campbell, 2005; Koenig, 2004). Kendler, Bulik, and Silberg (2000) reported that girls who experienced sexual abuse are three times more likely to abuse drugs and suffer psychiatric disorders, with 70–80% of sexual abuse victims engaging in heavy drug use (Day, Thurlow, & Woolliscroft, 2003).

Some women are introduced to drugs out of curiosity (Abdul Latip et al., 2022), leading to initial pleasure and eventually addiction. They may seek joy and relief from life's monotony through drug use. According to Hussain et al. (2017), some patients reported feeling euphoric and forgetting their worries after using heroin. Zili and Bukoski (2016) also found that drug use can induce euphoria that masks personal struggles.

In some cases, women use drugs to enhance physical stamina for work purposes. Substances like "pil kuda" (methamphetamine) provide excess energy, enabling them to perform multiple tasks, although at the expense of their health. Frone (2008) noted that occupational demands push women to use drugs for weight control, stress relief, enhanced performance, and energy, particularly in high-risk sectors like entertainment, arts, sports, and recreation.

Parental neglect is another key factor. Women who lack emotional support and experience loneliness are more likely to fall into depression and drug use (Abdul Latip et al., 2022). Lam Choong Kie (2017) emphasized that busy parents often fail to provide attention, leading children to seek validation through drug use sometimes as a cry for help. Unfortunately, these actions can result in severe personal harm.

Lastly, peer influence plays a significant role. Norruzeyati et al. (2019) highlighted how peer pressure and the need for social acceptance drive women to experiment with drugs. Social bonding and emotional reliance on friends due to a lack of parental attention lead some women to see friends as their primary emotional support. This attachment can increase their vulnerability to drug related behaviours.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is hoped that this research will provide exposure and raise awareness among the public regarding the issue of drug abuse among adolescents, particularly from the perspective of environmental influences. In Islam, preserving the mind is one of the Maqasid Syariah (primary objectives of the Shariah), and drugs that harm the mind are clearly prohibited because they prevent individuals from fulfilling their trust as servants of Allah. This issue must be taken seriously by all parties because adolescents are the assets of the ummah who will inherit leadership and shape the country's future.

Efforts to treat and rehabilitate drug addicts require a comprehensive and integrated approach, not just relying on treatment centres alone. Cooperation from families, employers, and the community is crucial to support the rehabilitation process and strengthen the individual's sense of identity. Islam places great emphasis on the concepts of *islah*

(reformation) and *taubat* (repentance), which offer individuals the opportunity to change and return to the right path. Therefore, all parties, including parents, teachers, and society, need to play an active role in supporting drug prevention and rehabilitation programs. With this approach, the Muslim community in Malaysia will become more aware of the dangers of drugs and unite in efforts to protect future generations from moral and life corruption.

This research offers both theoretical and contextual contributions to the field of adolescent drug abuse studies. Theoretically, it enhances the understanding of gender-based differences by integrating environmental factors such as peer influence, family dynamics, and community exposure. These insights contribute to existing models of behavioral health and adolescent development by emphasizing the intersection between gender and environment in the context of substance abuse. Contextually, the study provides empirical data from Melaka, Malaysia, which is underrepresented in global literature. By focusing on adolescents in this specific region, the findings offer a localized perspective that can inform culturally and regionally appropriate interventions. This dual contribution not only strengthens the literature but also provides practical implications for stakeholders such as educators, counselors, and policymakers in addressing drug abuse among Malaysian youth.

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